



Memorandum

TO: City Council

FROM: Mayor Ron Gonzales

SUBJECT: Adoption of Hattiesburg, Miss., through
United States Conference of Mayors
Hurricane Relief City Adoption Program

DATE: October 24, 2005

Approved:

Date:

10/24/05

RECOMMENDATION

As part of our continuing response to the Hurricane Katrina disaster, I recommend that the City Council adopt Hattiesburg, Mississippi, through the United States Conference of Mayors "city adoption" program.

I further recommend the following actions:

1. Direct the Mayor to continue discussions with Hattiesburg Mayor Johnny Dupree to identify ways for the San José community to assist with hurricane relief, recovery, and rebuilding efforts in Hattiesburg.
2. Direct the City Manager to designate a Deputy City Manager to lead this effort in coordination with the Mayor's Office and return to the City Council with periodic updates about this relationship as well as about other hurricane relief and support actions previously approved by Council.

BACKGROUND

Hurricane Katrina devastated Gulf Coast communities beyond comprehension and has affected hundreds of thousands of people who have suffered the loss of their loved ones, their homes, and their communities. We are only beginning to grasp the immense toll of injury, damage, and displacement, but we know that it will touch all Americans for months and years to come.

When disaster strikes, we look first to our neighbors for help. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have taught us that we are all neighbors in America, and we need to reach out to communities that have been severely damaged to help them get back on their feet. Cities like San José have already helped to raise cash donations, house evacuees, and send emergency response personnel to the hurricane-ravaged region.

Mayors from across the country have asked how their communities can help by establishing direct, long-term relationships with impacted cities in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. Most of the affected cities and towns are small and have not received much news media attention about their current needs or the challenges they face for rebuilding.

In response, last month United States Conference of Mayors teamed with the National Conference of Black Mayors to create a framework for cities to adopt specific communities and provide direct assistance to help with relief, recovery, and rebuilding. Cities across the nation are being asked to create special relationships with Gulf Coast communities to address their critical short and long-term needs. The program encourages each city-to-city relationship to define the nature of assistance based on the specific requirements of a community and the suitable support and resources available from "adopting" cities. Multiple cities may adopt a single community to expand the range of assistance that can be available.

My recommendation to adopt Hattiesburg is another example of what we can do in San José to help our neighbors thousands of miles from us. We already have a personal link to Hattiesburg through former San José Vice Mayor Iola Williams, who retired to Mississippi after her public service in our city in the 1990s. In addition, the Hattiesburg local newspaper editor was a graduate from Santa Teresa High School in San José and star NFL football player before moving to Hattiesburg.

Hattiesburg is the fourth largest city in Mississippi, with a population of about 50,000. It is located 100 miles northeast of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, and suffered widespread storm damage as a result of Hurricane Katrina. In addition, thousands of hurricane evacuees from other Mississippi communities and New Orleans arrived in Hattiesburg.

My office is currently working with Hattiesburg Mayor Johnny Dupree and his staff to identify their community's needs and how San José might help. We have also reached out to Ms. Williams about the hurricane's impact on her community and ways that San José could assist. Examples of ways in which San José might offer assistance include:

- Facilitating community-to-community partnerships involving faith-based organizations, service clubs, neighborhood and community groups, schools, and businesses.
- Deploying City staff and community volunteers to provide specific expertise needed for rebuilding.
- Sharing or donating surplus equipment.
- Replenishing libraries and assisting schools.
- Donating building materials and community supplies.
- Facilitating fundraising activities in San José to provide direct assistance.

In preliminary discussions with the City of Hattiesburg, my staff learned that their immediate needs are housing assistance for displaced families, removal of storm debris from streets, homes and businesses, and personnel relief and support, especially for building and code inspection, law enforcement, and equipment operators. As we learn more about Hattiesburg's needs and our opportunities to lend a hand, we will share them with the City Council and our community.

Adopting a community in the Gulf Coast region is consistent with previous Council actions to provide assistance to the people and communities following the widespread destruction caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The City Council has already approved my previous recommendations to provide disaster aid that include:

1. Donating up to \$500,000 to the Santa Clara Valley Chapter of the American Red Cross to support local relief and recovery assistance for hurricane evacuees arriving in our region.
2. Encouraging our neighboring communities and the County of Santa Clara to join us in contributing to the relief effort by donating a similar amount per resident to the Santa Clara Valley Red Cross local Hurricane Katrina relief effort.
3. Expanding our Military Leave Program to include City employees who are called up and deployed through the National Guard or Reserves to assist with Hurricane Katrina recovery and relief efforts.
4. Sending additional public safety personnel to assist with rescue and recovery efforts in the Gulf Coast region, as requested by FEMA or the California mutual aid program.
5. Creating a program to support the deployment of City employees skilled to respond and assist with recovery and rebuilding efforts in the Gulf Coast (our first group to be sent is a team of nine San José code enforcement inspectors currently in New Orleans).

This city adoption program is one more way the people of San José can aid devastated communities. We know that if such a major disaster were to occur here, we too would call upon the nation and other cities for help. We are confident Americans would also respond without hesitation to our requests for relief and reconstruction. Together these steps enable San José and the people of our community to provide meaningful assistance to help our fellow Americans in their time of greatest need.

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